

## **SECTION 11 PARTNERS**

Conservation Districts partner with many local and statewide groups and organizations. However, the two main agencies that assist with Conservation Districts are:

- Michigan Department of Agriculture
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

There are also three main non-profit organizations that assist Districts:

- Michigan Association of Conservation Districts
- Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees
- National Association of Conservation Districts

### **Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA)**

The Conservation District Act provides for the Michigan Department of Agriculture to coordinate programs of the various Conservation Districts, assist in planning local programs, assure that each District is operated and maintained as an entity of government and to administer state allocated grants to Conservation Districts. The Environmental Stewardship Division staff of the Michigan Department of Agriculture carries out local District administration assistance and program coordination functions.

Under this arrangement the **Conservation District:**

#### **Must:**

- Submit an annual audit report, a copy of its annual report, and its regular and special meeting minutes to the Michigan Department of Agriculture.
- Notify the Michigan Department of Agriculture of the time and place of the annual meeting and method of election; submit director election certificate and oaths of office.
- Upon request, submit other documents and information necessary to maintain the District as an entity of government.

#### **May:**

- Request assistance in planning and implementing its program.

In turn, the **Michigan Department of Agriculture**

**Must:**

- Arrange for cooperation and financial and other assistance to Districts from state and federal governmental units.
- Offer assistance to local Districts in carrying out their statutory responsibilities.
- Approve and coordinate local programs.
- Disseminate natural resource conservation information.
- Certify election results and audit reports.
- Conduct and supervise procedures which assure that each organized Conservation District is maintained and operated as an entity of government as provided in Public Act 267, the Open Meetings Act.
- Keep a file of all legal documents required to maintain each District as an entity of government.

**May:**

- Require such documents and reports as needed to assist in coordinating all conservation programs.
- Develop printed materials to assist Districts in promoting soil and water conservation among the general public.
- Develop and conduct training programs for directors and staff to assist in effective District program development and implementation.

For more information on MDA visit their website at: [www.michigan.gov/mda](http://www.michigan.gov/mda)

**USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a federal agency with the very general goal of natural resource conservation. Primarily working on farm resource conservation, the NRCS also deals with other private and public resources. A Memorandum of Understanding was executed between the USDA NRCS and the District at the time of its organization. This agreement allows the Conservation District to utilize the technical service of the NRCS. Most Districts have a NRCS employee called the NRCS Conservationist. In general, the agreement says that the NRCS:

1. Will assign technical personnel to the District.
2. Will provide assistance in accordance with District's annual plan.

3. Will consult with Districts in advance when personnel and/or assistance changes are to be made.
4. Will notify Districts in advance when changes are to be made.
5. May provide office facilities.

For more information on NRCS visit their website at: [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

### **Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD)**

The Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization established to represent and provide services to Michigan's 82 Conservation Districts. It was organized in 1940 as Michigan Soil Conservation Districts Incorporated, which became the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts in 1978.

The MACD represents its members at the state level by working with legislators, cooperating agencies, and special interest groups whose programs affect the care and management of Michigan's natural resources, especially on private lands. At the national level, the state association coordinates its activities with and supports the National Association of Conservation Districts to keep the public, Congress, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and environmental interest groups aware of the nation's natural resource conservation needs.

The state association serves its members by providing timely communications and information, educational and leadership development programs, and forums where issues of mutual concern can be discussed and solutions shared. MACD also conducts campaigns and programs that strengthen objectives and programs of local districts, and encourage land users to adopt conservation programs that protect natural resources.

For the purpose of the association, the Districts are organized into ten (10) geographic regions. MACD is governed by thirteen (13) council members each representing one of the ten regions, plus three (3) officers. The MACD State Council members are District directors who have accepted the added responsibility of representing their regions. MACD is supported by member District dues, grants, and contributions from: District directors and employees, agency personnel, renewable resource-based industries, business and organizations, educators, and other individuals concerned about the wise care and management of the state's natural resources.

For more information on MACD visit their website at: [www.macd.org](http://www.macd.org)

### **Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE)**

The Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE) is a private organization formed by District employees across the state. Its general goal is to represent the needs of some 200 District employees.

A board of directors, made up of one District employee from each of the 10 MACD regions across the state, governs it. MACDE uses its large group buying power to procure things like the group health plan from Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

For more information on MACDE, visit their website at: [www.macde.org](http://www.macde.org)

### **National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)**

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), formed in 1946, is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, which represents more than 3000 Conservation Districts nationally. The NACD maintains offices in Washington D.C. and has regional representatives located throughout the country. It provides timely communications and information, educational and leadership development programs, and forums. The NACD has established a strong voice on soil, water and other natural resource concerns at the national level.

The NACD conducts campaigns and programs that strengthen objectives and programs of local Districts, and encourages land users to adopt conservation programs that protect soil, water, and related natural resources.

For more information on NACD, visit their website at: [www.nacdnet.org](http://www.nacdnet.org)

### **Districts Partnering With Districts**

Many of Michigan's Conservation Districts most important partners are each other. Districts partner with other Districts for a variety of reasons: sharing programs, staff, equipment, and advertising and promotional campaigns. It is a good idea for Districts to sign a Memorandum of Understanding if two or more Districts are partnering together.

There are several grant programs (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Forestry Assistance Program, Groundwater Stewardship Program, etc.) that are implemented between Districts that specify the roles and responsibilities of "Host Districts" (Districts who are administering the program) and "Non-Host Districts" (Districts whose counties are included in the grant program but are not administering the grant).

The following is a list of roles and responsibilities that is recommended by the Michigan Department of Agriculture, Environmental Stewardship Division for Host and Non-Host Districts:

**Host Districts** (Conservation District board through the administrator/executive director):

- Daily supervision of grant employee
- Participate at meetings related to the grant program
- Ensure proposal deliverables are met
- Accountability (budget, time, performance appraisal, appropriate expenditures, documentation of work completed)
- Establish salary and administrative budget
- Computer/internet/network support
- Promote and advertise availability of Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program services
- Administrative/Clerical support for technician or AmeriCorps (the minimum to include: copying, printing, word processing support, taking messages, keeping a copy of groundwater technician's calendar)
- Continuity of AmeriCorps and technicians
- Keep staff focused on work that supports Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program mission
- Hire, discipline, reward and fire staff
- Help AmeriCorps and technicians succeed
- Write grant proposal. The local Groundwater Stewardship Team may want to just provide input on what is to go in the grant proposal and then host site and non-host site personnel and groundwater technician will write the proposal with review by the Team.

**Non-Host Districts** (Conservation District board through the administrator/ executive director; these are the minimum expectations):

- Participate at local Groundwater Stewardship Team meetings
- Give farmer referrals

- Route requests for services
- Sometimes provide office space

Host Districts may delegate or share some of their responsibilities with the Non-Host Districts.

### **Other Partners in Conservation**

#### **U.S.D.A. Farm Services Agency (FSA)**

A federal agency that provides cost share moneys for federally driven programs. Most of this cost share money is for farming related activities. Assists the District board with the establishment of the local work group, which develops resource issues for submission for funding under federal USDA programs. Many Conservation Districts are in buildings with an FSA office (a.k.a. the USDA Service Unit). For up-to-date information on FSA programs, visit their website at: [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

#### **Michigan State University Extension (MSUE)**

This federal Michigan State University partnership provides local experts in agronomy, horticulture, home economics, etc. Even though extension agents are not located in every county, they do try to cover all of Michigan. MSUE staff serves as another source of information and assist Districts in demonstration and education programs, which promote interest in, and understanding of conservation needs, problems and solutions. Many Districts have an extension person attend District board meetings. For more information on MSUE and their on-going programs, visit their website at: [www.msue.msu.edu](http://www.msue.msu.edu).

#### **Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)**

Currently in Michigan there are seven Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) areas, which cover most Districts. RC&Ds provide a multipurpose approach to resource management. Conservation Districts provide membership to the area RC&D council and generally pay RC&D dues. In Michigan, the RC&Ds have organized themselves into non-profit organizations. They administer grant projects for and through Conservation Districts. Staff assistance is provided by NRCS and many of the RC&Ds have hired additional staff. Ask your administrator/executive director for detailed information regarding your RC&D area.

#### **Agricultural Experiment Station (AES)**

The Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) is part of Michigan State University. The AES conducts research and demonstrations in the area of agriculture and natural resources. There are several research stations located around Michigan. Conservation Districts can cooperate with AES in conducting on-farm or in-forest demonstrations and research. AES specialists are available to provide input into Conservation District programs and in conducting technical workshops for landowners. For more information, contact your local MSU Extension agent or visit their website at: [www.maes.msu.edu](http://www.maes.msu.edu).

### **County Drain Commissioner**

County drain commissioners are locally elected officials charged with providing for local water management. All counties with a population of over 12,000 should have an elected county drain commissioner. In smaller counties, the county road commission is often the responsible authority. Conservation Districts have entered into agreements with their county drain commissioner relative to drain maintenance activities and inspections.

### **Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) is responsible for the management of the state natural resources especially as it relates to state-owned land. The divisions that Conservation Districts have the most contact with are listed below. For more information on MDNR divisions and programs, visit their website at: [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr).

**Forestry Division** - Provides technical assistance to private woodland users through the Forestry Assistance Program. Assists Districts with forestry programs.

**Wildlife Division** - Provides grants to Conservation Districts to provide technical assistance in establishing improved wildlife habitat on private lands.

### **Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)**

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) is responsible for enforcement of many natural resource and environmental regulations including wetlands, surface water quality, and soil erosion and sedimentation control. MDEQ also provides grants to Conservation Districts to conduct non-point source pollution control programs on a watershed basis. This federal program is known as the 319 watershed program and it is administered through the Water Division. For more information on MDEQ divisions and programs, visit their website at: [www.michigan.gov/deq](http://www.michigan.gov/deq).

### **Other Organizations**

Many Districts have working agreements and/or memoranda of understanding with other local, state and federal agencies, which define specific roles of these agencies in District programs. In addition, there are many organizations that Conservation Districts can and will interact with, such as: Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, land conservancies, other environmental groups, foundations, local and state governmental officials, businesses, etc. These organizations can be a source of funding, resources, or other program support. They broaden the Districts' network and extend its power to get conservation accomplished for the good of the citizens of the District.